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PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDS #0352/01 0430917
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 120917Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9523
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 2117
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7243
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000352

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2018

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA/ERITREA: UNMEE'S RELOCATION TO ETHIOPIA
UNDERWAY

REF: A. 08 ADDIS ABABA 117

[1](#)B. 08 ADDIS ABABA 304

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On February 11, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary General Azouz Ennifar and United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Force Commander Major General Taisir Masadeh briefed the Ambassador and the diplomatic community that UNMEE's relocation from Eritrea to Ethiopia was underway and that he expected all UNMEE military forces to be out of Eritrea by the end of February. Ennifar noted that UNMEE did not have the fuel to remove all its equipment and assets and therefore would leave some behind with a small civilian staff in Asmara. General Taisir added that UNMEE would make every attempt to remove as much equipment of military value as possible. Ennifar stressed that the relocation to Ethiopia was temporary, perhaps only three months, and that the relocating forces would not operate in Ethiopia under an agreement with the Ethiopian government, which did not want additional observation of its own military activities. Lastly, Ennifar insisted that the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) still exists and that UNMEE's departure did not in any way impact on the 2000 Cessation of Hostilities Agreements signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea. END SUMMARY.

UNMEE'S RELOCATION OPERATION STARTING

[1](#)2. (C) Ennifar opened by announcing that because of continued Eritrean fuel restrictions (REF A) the UN Secretary General on February 5 approved UNMEE's relocation to Ethiopia and that the process had begun. Ennifar said that UNMEE will keep a small civilian staff in place in Asmara, but that all other UNMEE personnel will move to Ethiopia. He expected all military forces to be out of Eritrea by the end of February and the last departing civilians out by mid-March except for those in Asmara headquarters. Ennifar said that he had notified the Eritrean government, but that UNMEE had yet to receive any reaction from Asmara. He also explained that he did not yet have permission from the Eritrean government to leave a civilian contingent in Asmara.

[1](#)3. (C) Ennifar introduced the UN technical assessment team

sent to explore future options for UNMEE, and noted Asmara gave them permission and visas to visit Eritrea, but that the Eritrean government canceled the visas at the last minute without explanation.

14. (C) General Taisir added that the first convoy of five trucks had crossed the border on February 10 with no problems. He said that the convoy was a test of Eritrea's willingness to let UNMEE depart with equipment and that a second convoy would be sent across the border on February 11 to test Eritrea again. Large-scale movement of UNMEE forces will commence on February 13. (NOTE: The relocation will consist of the movement of approximately 1,450 military and civilian personnel from Eritrea to Ethiopia where UNMEE already has 250 personnel deployed.)

UNMEE WILL LEAVE SOME EQUIPMENT/INFRASTRUCTURE BEHIND

15. (C) Ennifar noted that UNMEE did not have the fuel and time to remove all of UNMEE's equipment and infrastructure. Therefore, UNMEE would present Asmara with concise lists of all equipment left behind. He said the UNMEE civilian staff left in Asmara would be primarily employed with administrative duties monitoring the remaining equipment, but that all of the field locations, including 21 posts and 11 team sites, would be left unoccupied. General Taisir added that UNMEE had only 90,000 liters of fuel to conduct the operation.

16. (C) General Taisir underscored that UNMEE forces would make every attempt to remove all military stores and

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equipment that might be of military use should the government of Eritrea confiscate what UNMEE leaves behind. The UN head of the technical mission stressed that the UN would maintain accountability for the equipment and that if the UN was unable to retrieve it, Asmara would be presented with the bill. The Ambassador noted that the United States was still attempting to obtain compensation for equipment confiscated by Asmara during the 1998-2000 border war and many around the table expressed skepticism that the equipment would ever be retrieved.

17. (C) When queried what might be the financial impact of UNMEE's departure on Eritrea, Ennifar responded that he did not know for sure, but that since all of UNMEE's sites would remain in place, UNMEE would continue to pay rent to the Eritrean government.

RELOCATION TO ETHIOPIA TEMPORARY

18. (C) Ennifar said that the Ethiopian government had agreed to the relocation with the demand that the relocating UNMEE forces, particularly the additional military observers, would not operate in Ethiopia and that they would remain in Ethiopia only for a short time. Ennifar estimated that the forces would be in Ethiopia for approximately three months. Ennifar said the decision to relocate was made by the Secretary General, but that what happens next is up to the

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Security Council. The UNMEE forces already in Ethiopia will continue to operate as they have been, monitoring the flashpoints and major lines of communication at the border.

19. (C) The head of the assessment team, in response to a question on the possible use of satellite imagery to monitor the border, noted that it was the UN's policy that the host country, in this case both Ethiopia and Eritrea, must give permission for any aerial observation activities to occur. Few around the table expected either country to grant such

access. Ennifar added that helicopter observation of Eritrea from Ethiopian airspace would be of limited use because the harsh terrain would limit visibility and that UNMEE helicopters flying too close to Eritrean airspace risked being fired upon by Eritrean forces.

UNMEE: TEMPORARY SECURITY ZONE STILL EXISTS

¶10. (C) Ennifar asserted that it was the UN's position that the Temporary Security Zone--the 25 kilometer wide buffer zone largely in Eritrea that previously separated the Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries--remained in place despite UNMEE's departure. He also noted that UNMEE's relocation in no way impacts on the Cessation of Hostilities Agreements signed by the two parties at the end of the last war.

TEMPORARY SITES IN ETHIOPIA IDENTIFIED

¶11. (C) Under the arrangement agreed to between UNMEE and Ethiopia, UNMEE will cross the border at Badme, Mereb Bridge, Zela Ambessa, and Bure. The Force Commander and his staff will move to Mekele, the Indian Battalion will move to Adigrat, the Jordanian Battalion will move to Axum, and the Assab contingent will move to Manda. UNMEE's hospital in Asmara will be moved to Axum.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Although the UN continues to characterize UNMEE's relocation to Ethiopia as temporary, few observers in Addis Ababa believe the mission will ever return to Eritrea. The issue of the equipment and infrastructure left behind in Eritrea by UNMEE almost certainly will become an open sore, particularly with the troop contributing countries to whom

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the equipment belongs. While Ethiopian CHOD General Samora does not see any utility to UNMEE and prefers that it depart, Prime Minister Meles appears willing to accept UNMEE's continued presence in Ethiopia provided UNMEE is changed into a downsized observer mission focused on monitoring Eritrean military activity rather than observing Ethiopian military movements. However, in order to facilitate UNMEE's reconfiguration, discussions with Meles should occur soon to determine Ethiopia's conditions for such an arrangement, as it is clear he will not permit UNMEE to operate under its current mandate beyond July 31, 2008.
YAMAMOTO